

POLIN

STUDIES IN POLISH JEWRY

VOLUME TWENTY-FIVE

Jews in the Former Grand Duchy of Lithuania since 1772

Edited by

SARUNAS LIEKIS, ANTONY POLONSKY

and

CHAERAN FREEZE

Published for

The Institute for Polish-Jewish Studies

and

The American Association for Polish-Jewish Studies

Oxford Portland, Oregon

The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization

2013

The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization

Chief Executive Officer: Ludo Craddock

Managing Editor: Connie Webber

PO Box 64s, Oxford OX2 0UJ, UK

www.littman.co.uk

Published in the United States and Canada by

The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization

c/o ISBS, 920 NE 58th Avenue, Suite 300

Portland, Oregon 97213-J786

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A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication data applied for

ISSN 02681056

ISBN 978-1-904113-93-5

ISBN 978-1-904113-94-2 (pbk)

Publishing co-ordinator: Janet Moth

Production: John Saunders

Copy-editing: George Tulloch

Proof-reading: Bonnie Blackburn and Joyce Rappoport

Index: Bonnie Blackburn

Design: Pete Russell, Faringdon, Oxon.

Typeset by: John Saunders Design & Production, Eastbourne

Printed in Great Britain on acid-free paper by

TJ International Ltd, Padstow, Cornwall

Articles appearing in this publication are abstracted and indexed in
Historical Abstracts and America: History and Life

Walking a Thin Line

The Successes and Failures of Socialist Zionism in Lithuania

EGLĖ BENDIKAITĖ

JEWISH emigration to the United States and South Africa rose significantly following the worsening of the Jews' situation in tsarist Russia in the 1880s. Another reaction to the crisis was the renewed involvement of radical Jewish youth in Russia's revolutionary movement. The socialist movement in Russia and its leaders, with their combative stance and promises of change, naturally attracted those young Jewish people, who not only wanted to be in the midst of these events, but also hoped that their personal input would change the social structure and Jews' position within it. Attracted by the ideas of socialism, they aligned themselves with pro-revolutionary militant Jewish and non-Jewish labour organizations and were ready to fight for social and civil equality. But, as the experience of history shows, Marxist socialist parties in Russia were not interested in resolving the 'Jewish question', and as long as their Jewish colleagues accentuated matters of specific importance to themselves, the path towards any ideological closeness was closed. Moreover, the absolute monarchical regime in the Russian empire was replaced after the revolution of 1917 with a socialist-communist regime, 'bypassing' a liberal period, and the so-called *tovarishch* (comrade) majority justified the extremist and radical antisemitic consequences of the increasingly savage class struggle.¹

The socialist Zionist orientation, which gradually became an integral and leading part of world Zionism, was at first viewed sceptically by both the Zionist and the Jewish socialist camps, who believed that such a 'combination' of ideologies was impossible. Socialism, according to some, was merely an illusion, while Zionism, according to others, was just an empty dream.² The development of theoretical Zionist thought was reflected in a practical way in Vilna. The environment that made possible the formation of the Zionist Orthodox bloc Mizrahi also produced a whole swathe of other organizations of a socialist orientation, such as Po'alei Tsiyon

¹ S. M. Dubnov [Dubnow] and B. Ts. Dinur, *Dve kontseptsii evreiskogo natsional'nogo vozrozhdeniya* (Jerusalem, 1990), 15.

² N. Syrkin, 'Natsionalizm na fone klassovoi bor'by', in Sh. Avineri (ed.), *Osnovnye napravleniya v evreiskoi politicheskoi mysli* (Jerusalem, 1990), 191, 194.

(Workers of Zion) and Tse'irei Tsiyon (Youth of Zion), that expressed the awakening Jewish aspirations to nationhood and social liberation.³

No study dedicated to the history of Lithuania's Jews can avoid a discussion of Jewish political movements. Yet few actually analyse the history of Jewish political organizations or the details of their activities.⁴ Scholarship in Israel, North America, and Europe, on all scales from encyclopedias and monographs down to individual articles that investigate different aspects of the world Zionist movement, is rich in terms of chronology, geography, and language. Nevertheless, in this literature the history of Zionism in Lithuania has been left practically untouched.⁵

In an attempt to fill this gap, this chapter, based on archival material, Zionist socialist pamphlets, proclamations, and activity reports, the periodical press of the time, and recent studies of the history of Lithuania's Jews, will attempt to examine the left wing of the Lithuanian Zionist movement, Zionist socialism—its organizational structure, the scope of its activity in political and social life, its most important fields of activity, and the extent of its influence on the 'Jewish street'.

A MISSION WITHIN A MISSION

After the first Zionist Congress in Basel in 1897, the Zionist movement gradually developed organizational structures with specific programmes and practical objectives. The Jewish nationalist movement, much like other Jewish movements from previous centuries, did not maintain a single line for long, and divided into competing factions—political, practical, and spiritual Zionism—giving rise to a whole range of liberal, religious, socialist, and revisionist parties, organizations, and societies. All the orientations of the Zionist movement had one goal—to resolve the 'Jewish question'—but the tactics to be employed in achieving this goal were various. To many leaders of political Zionism a link between Zionism and socialism appeared utopian, yet the view that these two ideologies could organically combine and be expressed in one movement had already appeared in the minds of individual activists of the Zionist movement.⁶ According to them, the goals of socialism, calling

³ A. Ben Tsvi, *Geshikhte fun tsiyonizm fun dr. hertsrl biz nokh der balfur deklaratsye* (Kaunas, 1935), 42–3; I. Maor, *Sionistskoe dvizhenie v Rossii* (Jerusalem, 1977), 81, 118.

⁴ See, however, M. Šubas, 'Sionistų sąjūdis Lietuvoje', *Mokslas ir Lietuva*, 1992, no. 4, pp. 115–25, and the separate section in D. Levin, *Trumpa žydų istorija Lietuvoje* (Vilnius, 2000), on the political activities of the Jews, including the Zionist wing.

⁵ Brief information on the topic of this chapter can be found in the following works: Maor, *Sionistskoe dvizhenie v Rossii*; E. Mendelsohn, *Zionism in Poland: The Formative Years, 1915–1926* (New Haven, 1981); id., *On Modern Jewish Politics* (New York and Oxford, 1993); J. Reinharz and A. Shapira (eds.), *Essential Papers on Zionism* (New York, 1996); V. Laker, *Istoriya sionizma* (Moscow, 2000); M. Brenner, *Geschichte des Zionismus* (Munich, 2002).

⁶ N. Syrkin, *The Jewish Problem and the Socialist Jewish State* (1898), extracts available at <http://www.zionism-israel.com/hdoc/N_Syrkin_Socialist_Jewish_State.htm>; B. Borochoy, *The National Question and the Class Struggle* (1905), available at <http://www.zionism-israel.com/hdoc/ber_borochoy_national_question.htm>.

for economic and social liberation, and those of Zionism, in the form of national liberation, did not only not contradict one another, but were in fact in complete harmony. Seeing socialism as a necessary component of the national struggle, the Zionist socialists envisaged a unique opportunity for the practical realization of socialist ideals, something that socialists in no other country could boast about. 'The Jews had a real opportunity to realize that which was seen as utopia for other nations, thereby carrying out their unique, historical mission.'⁷ As the Jews found themselves in extreme circumstances and were forced to search for a territory where they could establish their own state, they would also be the first who could seek to realize socialist ideals.

Socialist Zionism had a long and winding political road to travel as it tried to establish the legitimacy of its views on how to resolve the question of the Jews' situation in the diaspora. Even though some Zionist socialist organizations had already existed for three decades by the 1930s and were well represented on the executive committees of world Zionist organizations, Zionist socialist ideologues were still discussing the issue of their multifaceted political mission and its importance in the context of Jewish politics. According to them, socialist Zionism united three key principles: socialism—the aspiration to reform capitalist society through the establishment of the dominance of the working class; Zionism—the aspiration to undo the abnormal situation of the Jewish nation by creating its own national home in the Land of Israel; and emancipation—striving for full personal, civil, political, and national rights for Jews who continued to live their lives in the diaspora. Each of these principles was a goal in itself as well as an integral part of the general programme.⁸

Attempts were made to impress upon the activists themselves and on the surrounding populations, Jewish and non-Jewish, not only that Zionist and socialist principles were compatible and their objectives achievable, but also that their priorities did not neglect the main interest of the Jewish nation: to develop the national idea and find a possible way for the nation to have its own state:

We are socialists . . . together with the socialist workers' movement in all countries we declare a relentless war on capitalist society, in order to destroy the capitalist system, private ownership, and exploitation, and to create a socialist society based on common ownership, sharing the fruits of labour, and voluntary work . . . when the Jewish nation comes to be in an equal situation to that of the other nations of the world, and when our Jewish working class suffers under capitalism to the same extent as do other normal nations, we shall no longer need to be Zionists, we shall only be socialists, just as we are now . . . We are Zionists . . . let's say that socialism has been achieved, economic gains are no longer necessary for working people, and the Jews are equal citizens in the new society . . . and if socialism is the highest goal of humanity, then that is not all—first and foremost, the Jewish nation is the only nation in the world without a political home. We must direct all our efforts at creating a national centre in the

⁷ N. Syrkin, 'Evreiskii vopros i sotsialisticheskoe evreiskoe gosudarstvo', in A. Hertzberg (ed.), *Sionizm v kontekste istorii*, 2 vols. (Jerusalem, 1992), i. 122.

⁸ B. Loker, *Vos vilt tsyonistn-sotsyalistn* (Kaunas, 1930), 3.

Land of Israel. In other words, even if we no longer needed to be socialists, we would still need to be Zionists.⁹

In this way the objectives of socialism and Zionism were placed on an equal footing. According to Zionist socialists, each principle could only be realized through the realization of the other: ‘Socialism is not our means of realizing Zionism or the only guarantee for achieving equality for our nation in the diaspora . . . Zionism, in itself, is not our means of achieving the complete realization of socialism in the life of the Jewish nation.’¹⁰

ENEMIES OF THE REGIME AND OF SOCIETY

The growing divisions and disagreements on principles within the Russian Zionist camp, especially following the death of Theodor Herzl in 1904, as well as rapidly unfolding events that influenced the political and social life of the empire in general, also affected the socialist Zionists. The intensifying revolutionary mood of the public and the wave of anti-Jewish pogroms did not allow them to remain unresponsive to the problems of Jews or their everyday needs. In order to be able to unite the Jewish community, stand at the forefront of its progressive goals, and guide it in a national direction, the Zionist organization had to ‘cleanse itself of stagnant elements’.¹¹ Only this could guarantee effective action. Under these circumstances, the needs of the Jewish community in the early twentieth century seemed to be most aligned with the parties that accentuated a socialist basis.

In the beginning, the tsarist government’s toleration of Zionism was based on the calculation that the ideas of ‘pure Zionism’ which encouraged the concentration of all efforts on the establishment of a new Jewish community in Palestine would not involve activities such as the struggle for Jewish equality that would encompass the wider masses, disorientate the Jewish proletariat, or allow the spread of socialist ideas in their midst.¹² However, from official documents on Zionist activities dating from 1902–3, it becomes apparent that secret meetings of Zionist organizations were no longer limiting themselves to discussions of Zionist issues but were also touching on exclusively social problems: ‘Zionism was born as a movement of the Jewish bourgeoisie which, in attempting to gain support among the wider Jewish masses, has become more democratic, allowing other Zionist labour fractions to operate within its realm. Objectives typical of revolutionary party activities have appeared in their programmes.’¹³ The goal of mass emigration assumed a secondary position, while

⁹ B. Loker, *Vos viln tsyonistn-sotsyalistn*, 5–6.

¹⁰ Ibid. 7.

¹¹ I.L., ‘Unzer tseil’, *Dos yidishe folk*, 15 May 1906.

¹² A. Lokshin, ‘V poiskakh *modus vivendi*: Sionistskoe dvizhenie i tsarskoe pravitel’stvo v kontse XIX—nachale XX vekov’, in *Rossiiskii sionizm: Istoriya i kul’tura. Materialy nauchnoi konferentsii* (Moscow, 2002), 78–9.

¹³ Otnoshenie departamenta politsii Ministerstva vnutrennikh del sudebnomu sledovatelyu po vazhnym delam Vilenskogo okruzhnogo suda, undated: Lietuvos valstybės istorijos archyvas, Vilnius (hereafter LVIA), f. 668, ap. 1, b. 99, fo. 63.

within the borders of the Russian empire the movement threw its efforts behind the realization of a newly modified programme, which was not acceptable to the tsarist government.

After the 1905 revolution, the more hostile attitude of the government became apparent. Local administrative and police organs were informed in a government circular that any type of Zionist activity was illegal and banned in the Russian empire, unless it was related to immediate emigration.¹⁴ An explanatory statement also argued that Zionist activity was clearly ‘inimical to the maintenance of order in the state and public stability’.¹⁵ An order of 1 June 1907 again banned all Zionist organizations in Russia on the grounds that their political aspirations were inciting the Jewish community to engage in active struggle against their legal status.¹⁶ On the assumption that Zionist theory did indeed stand apart from its practical application, the authorities made no further attempts to discriminate between the ideologies of the various Zionist organizations, and simply attached a socialist label to all societies or parties sympathizing with or propagating Zionist ideals. On the government’s instructions, they were all to be liquidated.

However, tsarist officials did not manage to stamp out completely the smaller Zionist groups in the provinces of Kaunas and Vilna. In addition to the movement’s larger cores in Kaunas and Vilna, smaller centres existed in Panevėžys, Marijampolė, Ukmergė, Anykščiai, and Šiauliai.¹⁷ By the end of 1906, around thirty Zionist groupings could be counted in the Vilna province, four of which were in Vilna itself.¹⁸ Having dispersed the Kaunas Zionist socialist party group in 1907, the gendarmerie notes in its reports that during its existence the organization united up to 400 members and had a small library and a self-defence unit with its own central co-ordinating body—a district committee consisting of local activists.¹⁹ The latter’s social composition was very varied, and included school students, practitioners of the liberal professions, and some members of the middle class.

Its illegal nature meant that it was difficult for it to collect funds to enable campaign work and the publication of party literature, or to maintain contact with other Zionist groups, not to mention engage in any co-ordinated or continuous activities. Attempts to make contact with the ‘inconspicuously monitored’ local activists or leaders of Zionist groups by posing as visiting relatives making a short trip to a centre or by giving some other plausible explanation usually meant drawing on oneself the attention of police department agents and being entered on lists of suspects.²⁰ Both

¹⁴ Prikaz ministra vnutrennikh del no. 1446, 1906: LVIA, f. 378, ap. 1, b. 40, fo. 16.

¹⁵ Otnoshenie Ministerstva vnutrennikh del departamentu obshchikh del, 19 Dec. 1906: *ibid.* 17.

¹⁶ Postanovlenie, 25 June 1912: LVIA, f. 668, ap. 1, b. 166, fo. 28. See also Lokshin, ‘V poiskakh *modus vivendi*’, 84.

¹⁷ Svedenie ot sluchainogo zayavitelya: LVIA, f. 419, ap. 1, b. 214, fos. 55^v, 108^v.

¹⁸ Iz protokola obyska, 16 May 1908: LVIA, f. 668, ap. 1, b. 99, fo. 3.

¹⁹ Svodki agenturnykh svedenii po Kovenskoj gubernii po partii sionistov sotsialistov, 1910–11: LVIA, f. 419, ap. 1, b. 214, fo. 1^v.

²⁰ Agenturnoe donesenie, 8 June 1908: LVIA, f. 419, ap. 1, b. 146, fos. 10^v, 16^v.

drives to recruit new members in order to revitalize waning activity, and assemblies held in new conspiratorial meeting places offered tsarist government informers and secret agents rich opportunities to establish themselves at the heart of the Zionist movement.²¹ This happened, for example, during the reorganization of the Kaunas Zionist socialist committee. A certain Yanvarsky (a pseudonym—his real name remains unknown), one of the agents most active in collecting information on the Zionists, was invited to become one of the committee's new members, and had to try and avoid accepting until he had received permission from the commandant of the local gendarmerie.²²

At the beginning of the twentieth century, Zionist ideologies were still only taking shape, which explains the rather frequent cases in which Zionist-oriented activists turned to the territorialist camp and later to the Bund or Po'alei Tsiyon, or vice versa, or belonged to two or three different camps at the same time.²³ Their attempts to strengthen their position by uniting and searching for a common ideological platform often had no realistic foundation, yet the emergence of Zionist socialist groupings outside the tsarist empire did attract the attention of some activists.²⁴ In order for the content of the potential common programme to appeal strongly to both Jewish socialists and nationalists, they limited themselves to the search for general guidelines (for example on the resolution of the Jews' territorial issue, emigration, education), the possibilities and realization of which could be discussed further.²⁵

As the Zionist socialist organizations sought to realize their ideas among the wider Jewish masses and to react to the counter-revolutionary forces brewing in Russia, a leftist political line prevailed in them, and their leaders felt a greater solidarity with Russia's proletarian parties than with their local Zionists. For the sake of being able to participate in the creation of the 'great socialist future' and because of its Marxist orientation, the Po'alei Tsiyon movement demonstrated its independence and aimed to distance itself from the official political line of the international Zionist Organization.²⁶ Yet in practice its supporters engaged in Zionist activities, sending their delegates to the Zionist Congresses and collecting money for the Jewish National Fund.²⁷ Although the struggle for the class interests of Jewish workers was one of the prioritized fields of activity of the Zionist socialists, socialist parties propagating the 'pure ideals of socialism' suspected them of being an outpost

²¹ Otchet za 1909 noyabr' agenta Ioselya Lidskogo: *ibid.* 65^v.

²² Svedenie ot sotrudnika Yanvarskogo, 14 July 1910: LVIA, f. 419, ap. 1, b. 214, fos. 35^v, 36.

²³ Agenturnoe donesenie, 21 Aug. 1910: *ibid.* 64^v.

²⁴ In 1908–9 a whole series of conferences took place in Chicago, Antwerp, and Amsterdam at which discussions took place about making an attempt to unite the Jewish socialist, social democratic, and nationalist organizations.

²⁵ Agenturnoe donesenie nachal'niku zhandarmerii Vilenskoi gubernii, undated: LVIA, f. 419, ap. 1, b. 151, fos. 36, 36^v, 37.

²⁶ Laker, *Istoriya sionizma*, 417.

²⁷ Otnoshenie departamenta politsii Ministerstva vnutrennikh del sudebnomu sledovatelyu po vazhnym delam Vilenskogo okruzhnogo suda, 6 June 1908: LVIA, f. 668, ap. 1, b. 99, fos. 63^v, 64.

of the bourgeoisie, the greatest class enemies, who, once the opportunity presented itself, would rise to defend their class interests, going so far as to side with antisemitic forces.²⁸ In 1908–9, following the political intrigues of the Bundists behind the scenes, who stressed the bourgeois character of Zionism and its ideological incompatibility with the development of socialist thought and politics, the Zionist socialist representatives of the Vilna and Kaunas provinces, like those elsewhere in Russia, were excluded from International Socialist Congresses.²⁹

In turn, Zionist socialists accused other Jewish parties, whose socialist, autonomist, and other ideas were placed higher than their national interests, of engaging in a policy of assimilation, and of trying to deny their Jewishness in exchange for rights in the Russian or Polish environment. Declaring that they were capable of resolving both the temporary social and political difficulties as well as other Jewish problems, the Zionist socialists emphasized that they were the first to raise the flag for social and national equality, and that only they could bring the Jewish nation to real freedom, which was what distinguished them from other parties.³⁰

‘Unreliable in Both a Political and a Civic Sense’

Lithuania’s Jewish community was concentrated mostly in trade and in the liberal professions. The working class, which was relatively small in size, mostly comprised those who produced consumer products.³¹ They could hardly serve as the mouthpiece for the will of the world proletariat or as activists of the socialist revolution. Zionism in the diaspora, however, as it was envisaged by Zionist socialist ideologues, could give rise to a Jewish proletariat which, having grown into a core socialist society in its new national home, could lead the struggle towards political liberation. This is why, in their view, Zionism meant first of all a socialist revolution within the Jewish nation itself.³²

Following the First World War and their forced evacuation from Russia, along with other Jews, representatives of the new generation of Zionism began to return to Lithuania. Many of them had studied in Russian universities and brought back with them the fighting spirit of the Russian revolution and its ideas, reviving the local Zionists’ activities and acting as a breath of fresh air, thereby impressing Jewish youth yet also raising internal conflicts within the Zionist environment. Simon Rosenbaum, one of the most prominent leaders of Lithuania’s Zionist organization, describing the situation of Zionism in Lithuania at the end of 1918, noted that through the efforts of the returning activists, the Zionist movement had been

²⁸ Iz proklamatsii pervogo Maya 1913 g.: LVIA, f. 419, ap. 1, b. 910, fo. 8^v.

²⁹ Iz doneseniya predstavitelei Vilenskogo raiona tsentral’nomu komitetu partii, undated: LVIA, f. 419, ap. 1, b. 214, fo. 64^v.

³⁰ I.L., ‘Di tsvey punkten fun der tsyonistisher arbeyt’, *Dos yidische folk*, 31 May 1906.

³¹ According to statistics from the 1923 census of the Lithuanian population, only 7% of Jews were workers, the smallest occupational category among them with the exception of farmers. See *Lietuvos gyventojai: Pirmojo 1923 m. rugsėjo 17 d. visuotino gyventojų surašymo duomenys* (Kaunas, 1925), 295.

³² Loker, *Vos vilt tsyonistn-sotsyalistn*, 9.

strengthened in an ideological and a material sense. The ‘older Zionist commanders’ lost the initiative, and along with it, influence on the Jewish community. They began to distance themselves from the new forces propagating socialist Zionism and flirting with the Jewish political left wing.³³

The first local supporter of socialist Zionism in independent Lithuania was the Tse’irei Tsiyon organization. Its statutes were promulgated on 1 October 1920 in Vilna, and were certified by the then head of the Vilna Jewish community, Jacob Wygodzki.³⁴ Its territory was not only Vilna, but the entire Republic of Lithuania. The organization’s goal was to consolidate and unite the Jewish working masses there. By announcing measures for attaining this goal, in effect it set out guidelines for action which were followed by all left-wing Zionist organizations in inter-war Lithuania. They included carrying out cultural and educational work such as establishing schools and libraries and arranging courses for adults, lectures, agitational meetings, and concerts; improving the economic situation of Jewish workers by establishing consumer and credit co-operatives, unions, and trade schools; establishing training centres and popularizing agricultural activity among Jews; and preparing groups from their midst for emigration, which would establish themselves in Palestine and continue the work already started, applying the knowledge they had gained in the diaspora.³⁵

In 1921 the Lithuanian Zionist Organization (Hahistadrut Hatsiyonit Belita), whose central committee was based in Kaunas, declared in its statutes that Tse’irei Tsiyon would operate as a separate faction within the society.³⁶ The initiators of this renewed Zionist socialist organization in Kaunas were activists who had withdrawn from Vilna, Yeruhim Levin and Efraim Beloglavsky. They were later joined by the so-called ‘Russian group’, returnees from Russia, who included Nathan Grinblat, Isaac Brudny, Abraham Zabarsky, Ezriel Volk, Mordechai Fridman, and others.³⁷

The programmatic postulates of the Zionist socialists, which expressed concern for the welfare of the working class and promoted economic and social equality and guarantees for all citizens, appealed to the large Jewish middle class. On the other hand, it was clear that in order to strengthen their position and expand their numbers among the shtetl communities, drawing in Jews from a variety of age groups, levels of education, and social circumstances, the Zionist socialist movement could not orient itself solely on the Jewish proletariat. As a result, alongside this movement the League for the Working Erets Yisra’el (Di Lige farn Arbetndn Erets Yisroel) was founded, which united Jews of various standpoints and political

³³ Bericht des Herrn Rechtsanwalt Rosenbaum aus Wilna, über Litauen: Central Zionist Archives, Jerusalem, Z3, file 510.

³⁴ Ustavy partii ‘Tseirei Tsion’: YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, New York, Archives (hereafter YIVO Archives), RG 29, folder 284.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Statutes of the Lithuanian Zionist Organization, undated: YIVO Archives, RG 2, folder 1098.

³⁷ S. Fridman, ‘Di tsyonistishe sotsyalistishe bavegung in lite’, in H. Laykovich (ed.), *Lite*, ii (Tel Aviv, 1965), 69.

orientations who sympathized with the workers' movement, but did not necessarily want to see themselves under the banner of the Zionist socialists.³⁸

From its inception the Lithuanian Zionist Organization proclaimed that it was an integral part of the worldwide Zionist movement, accepting the rulings of the Zionist Congresses; any new developments and trends in the wider movement would find support in Lithuania too. Disagreements within the Lithuanian Zionist socialist movement were minor, and more tactical than ideological. However, in 1923, after two years of activity, the Tse'irei Tsiyon faction of the Lithuanian Zionist Organization followed the example of processes taking place in the worldwide movement and split into two separate parties: the Zionist Socialist Party and Tse'irei Tsiyon—Hitahadut (Unity).³⁹ Evidence that even after this split the ideological divide was not fundamental can be seen in the fact that the parties co-ordinated their activities on a practical political level, voicing their support for the creation of a united political Jewish front. They formed blocs in parliamentary and community council elections, though by contrast in elections to the Zionist Congresses they participated on separate lists. Hitahadut considered itself to be on the right of the Zionist socialist movement and was more oriented towards the service-providing sector, while the Zionist Socialist Party, adopting an 'internationalist socialist spirit', maintained a leftist political line that had more support among the Jewish workers and craftsmen, yet did not ignore either the Lithuanian Social Democrats or the Marxist Po'alei Tsiyon in Lithuania.⁴⁰ The latter, operating in only a semi-legal underground manner, brought government suspicion not only on themselves but also on members of the Zionist Socialist Party, whose branches were consequently restricted in their activity and were under constant surveillance. After the coup of 17 December 1926, because State Security Department agents believed that the Zionist Socialist Party was spreading communist ideas many branches had to be refounded, registered under new names, or combined with societies engaging in 'neutral' activities, in order to avoid being closed down. To rehabilitate themselves in the eyes of the Lithuanian government, in 1928 these Zionist Socialists registered the Nachman Syrkin Educational Organization (*Bildungs-Gezelshaft oyfn Nomen fun Dr. N. Sirkin in Lite*), named in honour of the famous activist of the Zionist movement who was the ideologue of their orientation. This was essentially the same old organization under a new name.⁴¹ Indeed, the State Security Department was convinced that the organization had simply been re-created by this ploy: 'the central committee and review commission consist exclusively of leftist Zionist socialists . . . they are members of a former communist organization, who in their beliefs remain communists even now'.⁴² Around

³⁸ Ibid. 66.

³⁹ Ibid. 69–70; *Barikht fun der tsveyter tseyre-tsyonistisher landes-konferents in lite (1921 12 27–1922 01 02)* (Kaunas, 1922), pp. i–ii.

⁴⁰ Levin, *Trumpa žydu istorija Lietuvoje*, 119.

⁴¹ Dr N. Syrkin on behalf of the Lithuanian Jewish Educational Society: Lietuvos centrinis valstybės archyvas, Vilnius (hereafter LCVA), f. 402, ap. 4, b. 572, fos. 1–34.

⁴² Notice from the Commander of the State Security Police, 17 Aug. 1937: LCVA, f. 438, ap. 1, b. 1032, fo. 19.

1930, the splintered Zionist Socialist and Tse'irei Tsiyon—Hitahadut organizations once again started to unite, and finally combined in 1932 to form the United Zionist Socialist Party (Fareynikte Tsyonistishe Sotsyalistishe Partey in Lite).⁴³

The transformations of the Zionist socialist organizations did not in any way reduce the attention paid to them by state security agents, and personal files on the Zionist socialist leaders were kept in the operational information division of the Criminal Police.⁴⁴ The activities of these 'individuals ill disposed to the existing order' were under constant surveillance. Operational information concerning their milieu and their former links with Russian socialist revolutionary organizations was also collected. The circumstances of the Zionist socialist organizations in independent Lithuania ended up being little different from those obtaining in the tsarist Russian empire. Having come under the watchful gaze of security and government organs because of the socialist component of their political programme, the Zionist socialists were identified as 'communist-leaning', engaging in 'hostile activity in Lithuania' and therefore 'unreliable in both a political and a civic sense'.⁴⁵

ACHIEVEMENTS ON THE JEWISH STREET

Pamphlets issued during elections to Zionist Congresses explaining why Lithuanian Jews should support the Zionist socialist candidates stressed the movement's value to the Jewish nation on a worldwide basis and attacked their opponents' failures:

Every friend of the workers, every conscious Zionist, and every true friend of the entire nation must vote for the Zionist socialist list and thereby ensure their majority at the World Zionist Congress. Regardless of the difficulty of the Zionist situation, they are the only ones who have not strayed from the path they have chosen, and have tried to uphold unity in the movement . . . Whoever wants a healthy, democratic, and lively Zionist movement with concrete actions must vote for the ambassadors of socialist Zionism to be sent to the congress, the loyal friends of workers of the Land of Israel.⁴⁶

Lithuania's Zionist socialists also relied on the merits of world socialist Zionism during electoral campaigning for Jewish councils or municipal councils,⁴⁷ but it is very hard to say just how much influence this may have had on the political consciousness of the organization's members or supporters, or on their sense that they were a part of a world movement. However, Zionist socialist leaders were certainly inspired by the belief that they were links in a much larger chain.

In December 1921, when opening Lithuania's Tse'irei Tsiyon conference, its influential leader Shmuel Fridman declared that only by strengthening its position

⁴³ LCVA, f. 378, ap. 10, b. 886, fos. 39–40; see also L. Chain-Shimoni, *Nekhtn* (Buenos Aires, 1959), 250.

⁴⁴ See the personal files in LCVA, f. 438, ap. 1–3.

⁴⁵ Report to the Minister of Internal Affairs, 21 Dec. 1928: LCVA, f. 438, ap. 1, b. 1032, fo. 9.

⁴⁶ Proclamation to the Jewish community about the 18th Zionist Congress: YIVO Archives, RG 2, folder 1453, fo. 66178.

⁴⁷ Proclamation to the Jewish community, undated: YIVO Archives, RG 10, box 108, folder 111.

in the diaspora could the Jewish nation expect to strive successfully for its goals and needs.⁴⁸ Zionist socialists were strong supporters of Jewish national autonomy in Lithuania and defenders of its institutions. Leib Garfunkel, the long-serving leader of Hitahadut, who was a well-known community activist, Lithuanian parliamentary deputy, general secretary and vice-chairman of the Jewish National Council, chairman of the Jewish Folksbank in Lithuania, and member of the Kaunas City Council, published a separate study on this issue.⁴⁹ He also tried on many occasions to defend his position at the highest levels of government. In deliberations on the draft law on Jewish national communities in the spring of 1925, Garfunkel tried to convince a majority of parliament that the law being discussed would only deepen the divide between the government and the Jewish minority and threaten the autonomous status of Lithuanian Jews.⁵⁰ The promulgation of the new Law on Societies at the beginning of 1936⁵¹ and the beginning of their re-registration gave rise to fresh discussions on the Jewish street about the renewal of projects for the establishment of Jewish communities. At the same time, while right-wing Jewish political forces, including some Zionist organizations, were proponents of national religious communities, the Zionist socialist representatives with Garfunkel at their head appealed for tight restrictions on Orthodox influence and the reduction of the powers of rabbis in the preparation of the draft law on the establishment of Jewish communities.⁵²

Lithuanian Zionist socialist organizations aimed to have their representatives in all the executive government organs so that they could properly uphold the goals of their movement, as well as defend the Jews' national, political, and civic rights. Zionist socialists defended the interests of the Jewish community in the Lithuanian Seimas (parliament), initiating discussion on and seeking resolutions to everyday problems, for example laws concerning the Jewish community, compulsory Sunday rest, the rules for using minority languages on signs, the founding of schools, matters of financing, and so on.⁵³ Zionist socialists were also active in municipal elections. Some were elected to city and town councils several times over, holding positions of considerable responsibility in these bodies: Shmuel Petukhovsky and Meyer Varshavsky were the vice-mayors of Šiauliai and Vilkaviškis, respectively, for a number of years.⁵⁴

On 20 June 1919 the Ministry of Jewish Affairs announced the provisions regulating elections to the Jewish community councils, which were to be direct, equal,

⁴⁸ *Barikht fun der tsveyer tseyre-tsyonistisher landes-konferents in lite*, 3.

⁴⁹ L. Garfunkelis, *Žydu tautinė autonomija Lietuvoje* (Kaunas, 1920).

⁵⁰ E. Bendikaitė, 'Garfunkelis Levas', in *Didysis Lietuvos parlamentarų žodynas*, iii: *Lietuvos Respublikos Seimų narių biografinis žodynas* (Vilnius, 2007), 262–7.

⁵¹ Law on Societies, *Vyriausybės žinios*, no. 522, 1 Feb. 1936, item 3626.

⁵² Meeting of representatives of Jewish organizations, 3 Feb. 1937: LCVA, f. 438, ap. 1, b. 1103, fo. 7.

⁵³ For more on this, see E. Bendikaitė, 'Bergeris Joselis', 'Brudnis Aizikas', 'Garfunkelis Levas', and 'Roginskis Joselis', in *Didysis Lietuvos parlamentarų žodynas*, iii. 205, 219, 262–7, 449–51.

⁵⁴ Fridman, 'Di tsyonistishe sotsyalistishe bavegung in lite', 69.

and general.⁵⁵ The earliest community council elections had in fact already taken place between 24 and 26 December 1918, and the Lithuanian Zionist Organization had actively urged Jews to take part in them, stressing that the more voters that came forward, the more significance the councils would have, and the better voter representation they could offer.⁵⁶ In the elections the Zionist camp won 37 per cent of the votes.⁵⁷ The Zionist socialists had to share the potential number of votes not only with other Zionist parties, but with other Jewish socialist organizations too. As a rule, in locations where a greater number of Tse'irei Tsiyon representatives were elected to the Jewish community councils, Jewish socialist representatives lost out; conversely, where Tse'irei Tsiyon did not win any seats on the council, the number of socialist representatives increased. The Zionist socialists only won an absolute majority of Jewish council members in two shtetls, Vainutas and Pilviškiai.⁵⁸ The executive committees of councils, which consisted of three to five individuals depending on the number of people in the community, usually had a Zionist socialist representative along with representatives of the General Zionist orientation and the Orthodox or Folkist wings.⁵⁹

The performance of the Zionist socialists was no less significant in congresses of community council representatives held in 1920–3 and in elections to the highest executive bodies of Jewish national autonomy. At the congress of Jewish community representatives in 1923 it was decided to convoke Lithuanian Jewish national assemblies regularly, delegates to which would be chosen through general elections. The 1923 National Assembly elected a new National Council, on which there were 11 General Zionists, 11 Zionist socialists, 10 Mizrahi representatives, 4 representatives of craftsmen's unions, 2 Po'alei Tsiyon representatives, and 2 Folkist representatives.⁶⁰

Tse'irei Tsiyon was pleased with the results it had achieved in the early stages of its existence: 'In the last year, the central committee has carried out important political agitation work. During the elections to the Jewish council, we were the second most popular. The branches that stood for the city councils on separate lists represented the party well . . . In the provincial areas, we are almost the only active party

⁵⁵ Tsirkular briv nr. 1: LCVA, f. 1129, ap. 1, b. 3, fos. 18–19.

⁵⁶ 'Yidn, mener un froyen!', undated: YIVO Archives, RG 10, box 10, folder 108, fo. 18244.

⁵⁷ Throughout the period 1919–21, representatives of Zionist organizations elected to Jewish community councils were on aggregate 52% General Zionists, 40% Tse'irei Tsiyon socialists, and 8% members of Mizrahi. These figures combine the results from forty-six Jewish communities from all over Lithuania. There were initially two Jewish communities registered in Alytus because of old administrative boundaries that divided the town into two parts. The calculations do not include the results from the Kaunas city Jewish council, where Zionist socialists participated in the elections on a common list with the General Zionists and won 13 out of 41 seats. The data were derived from LCVA, f. 1129, ap. 1, b. 16, fos. 1–283.

⁵⁸ Results of the elections to the Jewish community councils: LCVA, f. 1129, ap. 1, b. 16, fos. 1–283.

⁵⁹ M. Friedman, 'The Jewish Communities in Lithuania, 1919–1926: A Study Based on the Kehillot of Panevėžys and Vilkomir/Ukmergė', graduation thesis (New York, 1975), 30–41.

⁶⁰ S. Levenberg, 'Lithuania, Zionism', in R. Patai (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Zionism and Israel* (New York, 1971), 726.

in individual institutions.’⁶¹ The Zionist socialists devoted much attention to establishing and developing institutional branches of the world Zionist movement in Lithuania that were broad-ranging in scope and unquestionably important to all orientations of Zionism. The activities of the national foundation funds (Keren Hayesod and Keren Kayemet Leyisra’el) and the League for the Working Erets Yisra’el in the 1920s were maintained almost exclusively by the personal initiative of the Zionist socialists. In the inter-war period, the principal Palestinian foundation fund, Keren Hayesod, was headed by Leib Garfunkel, whom I have mentioned above. The Jewish Agency/Palestinian Department was associated with the names of Shmuel Fridman and Efraim Grinberg, who were members of the first generation of Zionist socialists in independent Lithuania.⁶²

Consumer and credit co-operatives, which became the backbone of economic and social life for Jews in inter-war Lithuania, were an inseparable part of the Jewish Folksbank network. The central Jewish bank was headed for more than a year by one of the most active Zionist socialist leaders, Isaac Brudny, while the existence of its branches in even the remotest provincial areas became possible as a result of Tse’irei Tsiyon—Hitahadut’s activists who took up important positions in Jewish economic and political circles: Abraham Zaborsky, Shlomo Kelzon, Tsvi Fort, Azriel Volk, and Yosel Berger.⁶³

An intensive ideological ‘war’ was launched on Jewish communities via educational institutions and the periodical press. The Tarbut (Education) branch of Jewish schools and education was a part of the Lithuanian Zionist Organization. With its particular focus on Hebrew as the language of instruction and educational content fostering national consciousness, the network of Tarbut institutions spread rapidly. In 1923–4, out of a total of 107 Jewish primary schools, 86 were of a Tarbut orientation, with more than 7,500 pupils in attendance.⁶⁴ Zionist organizations that founded schools on the basis of political motives and led by narrow party interests remained directly responsible for their upkeep. Schools that were maintained by Tse’irei Tsiyon or its followers were to be found in Biržai, Šakių Naumiestis, Anykščiai, and other towns in Lithuania.⁶⁵ ‘Our [Zionist socialist] cultural work must be carried out through Tarbut, defending our interests and struggling for a school of united “workers of the world”’, claimed Tse’irei Tsiyon at its annual conference in 1921–2, reiterating the tenets of its programme.⁶⁶ Yet as the party split up, Tarbut grew into an independent society supported by the Jewish community and receiving financial support from private funds and individuals. Unable to accept the fact that control of it was slipping out of their hands, the Zionist socialists

⁶¹ *Barikht fun der tsveyter tseyre-tsyonistisher landes-konferents in lite*, 4.

⁶² Fridman, ‘Di tsyonistische sotsyalistische bavegung in lite’, 65.

⁶³ *Ibid.* 67.

⁶⁴ *Der renesans fun hebreish in lite* (Kaunas, 1929), 7–8.

⁶⁵ ‘Bendras aukštesniųjų, vidurinių ir specialinių mokyklų sąrašas’, *Švietimo darbas*, 1927, no. 12, pp. 1472–81; To the Anykščiai community council: YIVO Archives, RG 2, folder 101.

⁶⁶ *Barikht fun der tsveyter tseyre-tsyonistisher landes-konferents in lite*, 4.

decided at a general meeting to withdraw from the society.⁶⁷ Despite having a number of teachers among their members and despite the support and guidance they gave to the schools they had founded, the Zionist socialists could not compete with the already existing educational societies or create a separate network of schools with a suitable curriculum.

Another field of cultural activity for Tse'irei Tsiyon was the founding of libraries in provincial shtetls. The main problem here was financial. Local Jewish community councils regularly received requests for subsidies for Tse'irei Tsiyon party libraries or to cover annual budget deficits. The requests highlighted the indisputably important role these libraries played in the social life of the Jewish community, and more often than not the requests were met with funds allocated from the community budget for the continuation of these activities.⁶⁸ Other means of raising funds for maintaining schools, libraries, or organized courses were explored too. The city or district branches of the Ministry of Education would be approached, or the Ministry of Jewish Affairs, which might either source the requested funds itself or require the local Jewish community councils to do so. Failing these, alternative means of resolving the difficulties would be suggested: unite with an already existing, albeit ideologically different school, or become a part of the main local Jewish library.⁶⁹

The Zionist socialists, much like the general or religious Zionist movements in Lithuania, had their own press organs. During its early period, the organization's semi-official publication was the pro-socialist newspaper *Erd un arbet* ('Land and Work'). Later, once it had split up, each party had its own paper, printed in Yiddish: from 1924 to 1932 the Zionist Socialist Party published the fortnightly *Unzer veg* ('Our Way'), while Tse'irei Tsiyon published *Unzer vort* ('Our Word'). When the organizations again united into a common bloc in 1932, the weekly newspaper *Di tsayt* ('Time') appeared, edited by Shmuel Fridman, while later still, in 1934, the same newspaper became a daily and changed its name to *Dos vort* ('The Word'). The editor, who had been repatriated to Palestine, was replaced in 1936 by a teacher at the Kaunas Jewish gymnasium, Efraim Grinberg.⁷⁰ The newspapers were highly regarded by the organization's members (who also happened to be the editors, active collaborators, and contributors of articles), and enjoyed popularity in society at large, also being quoted by Zionist socialist organizations abroad. However, internal memos show that branch members were continually solicited for 'a more substantial subvention of its press', despite the fact that subscription for party members was already mandatory. It was urged that as many subscribers should be enrolled as possible, and that they should pay for distributed issues on time; it was also not to be

⁶⁷ Fridman, 'Di tsiyonistishe sotsyalistishe bavegung in lite', 65.

⁶⁸ To the Marijampolė Jewish community council, 5 Dec. 1922: YIVO Archives, RG 2, folder 656, fos. 28858, 28859; To the Kėdainiai community council, 26 June 1921: YIVO Archives, RG 2, folder 977.

⁶⁹ An appeal to the Suveniškis Jewish community, 1924: YIVO Archives, RG 2, folder 1303, fo. 60216; To the Anykščiai community council: YIVO Archives, RG 2, folder 101.

⁷⁰ Fridman, 'Di tsiyonistishe sotsyalistishe bavegung in lite', 70.

forgotten that the paper had to seek out its readers in every conceivable location, and that it must not be in short supply in strategic sales locations such as newspaper kiosks at railway stations.⁷¹

The Lithuanian Jewish community enthusiastically supported fund-raising initiated by the Zionist organizations for the support of various foundations, emigrating Jews, labour federations, and kibbutzim in Palestine. The purchase of Jewish Colonial Trust shares in the form of shekels was one of the most important ways people could show their desire to join and practically support the Zionist movement. The number of shares purchased determined the number of votes allocated to a given region, hence every Zionist organization was interested in the sale of as many shares as possible, in order to maximize its mandates to the Zionist Congress. The number of these allocated to Lithuania was modest by world standards, even if individual Zionist party candidates were grouped as a whole.⁷² Nevertheless, election results reflected the general mood of the Lithuanian Jewish community and served as an indicator of the Zionist organizations' influence. Three thousand shekels sold guaranteed the organization only a few mandates. In 1927 the Zionist socialist bloc won only half of the potential four mandates, but the number of people buying shekels grew in later years, and by the mid-1930s Lithuania's Jews could send seventeen deputies to the Zionist Congress. There was a noticeable increase in the influence of the Zionist socialists, who received ten mandates out of the seventeen, while the remaining seven were distributed among the other four Zionist parties.⁷³

SATELLITE ORGANIZATIONS

Zionist socialist ideas in inter-war Lithuania linked a fair number of various organizations that were in one way or another related to the Zionist socialist movement. Some aimed to develop a specific field of socialist Zionism, while others were established to meet cultural or educational needs, or to promote sports or youth development. Yet the importance of their political activities, left unrecorded in their statutes, may have increased considerably once the state security agents began to intensify their 'supervision' of the activities of the main Zionist socialist organizations. The Zionist socialists reacted in accordance with methods that had been developed in the times of the Russian empire—that is, when their activities had attracted the attention of the state security and had been deemed illegal, they would register a new organization, innocent-looking and apparently apolitical.

Socialist-minded young Zionists joined the Hehaluts (Pioneer) movement, and its development was a key field of Zionist socialist activity. The organization's aim was to foster the spiritual, ideological, physical, and professional preparation needed

⁷¹ Tseyre-tsyon tsirkularn, 1923–4: YIVO Archives, RG 2, folder 1456.

⁷² E. Mendelsohn, 'Zionist Success and Zionist Failure: The Case of East Central Europe between the Wars', in Reinharz and Shapira (eds.), *Essential papers on Zionism*, 181.

⁷³ Levin, *Trumpa žydu istorija Lietuvoje*, 128; Levenberg, 'Lithuania, Zionism', 726.

to live in Palestine and work on a farm there. Thousands of young *ḥalutsim* were sent to various organizations, training centres, and agricultural co-operatives. Lithuania's young Zionist socialists, mainly school and university students, learnt a particular line of work in these co-operatives and had the opportunity to develop the new skills which they believed would be needed in the historic homeland. The organization also strenuously promoted educational and cultural activities, such as intensive Hebrew language courses, public lectures on the history of Israel, commemoration ceremonies, and marches.⁷⁴ There were even attempts at living in tents, imitating the life of new settlers in Palestine. However, these types of youth activities and the way of life in kibbutzim did not always meet with the approval of parents at home:

when Chadasa [a *ḥalutsah* who belonged to the left-wing Zionist youth organizations and took part in programmes to prepare for emigration] left, her mother and father were much saddened. Even though we were Zionists . . . they did not want her to leave. They could not understand why she would want to leave such a comfortable life for manual labour on farms, where she would have to work in the fields, chop firewood, and milk cows.⁷⁵

Moreover, to the older generation of Jews, life on a kibbutz separated from one's parents was associated with an immoral, non-law-abiding way of living. One member of the inter-war Zionist movement wrote thus about his family in his memoirs: 'The *hakhsharah* movement raised concerns in my father, who believed that it was insufficiently religious . . . Our mother was worried that in order to receive the certificate needed for departure, my sister would have to marry a stranger.'⁷⁶

Nevertheless, many young people had the courage to leave the place of their birth, join Hehaluts, and complete the programme of *hakhsharah* (preparation), a process that lasted at least a few months, which granted them the opportunity to emigrate. Among the Lithuanian Jewish community, Hehaluts was a veritable beacon, a guarantee of a better future for young people. The initially positive attitude of the Lithuanian government towards *ḥalutsim* changed in the 1930s, when it was suspected that socialist ideas were being spread in the branches of the organization. Some co-operatives that had belonged to the organization were disbanded under government orders, and could only continue to operate privately. The Avodah (Work) workshops in Kaunas that had belonged to Hehaluts were facing liquidation, while those of its members who were found with communist literature were threatened with criminal proceedings. The state security organs doubted that the organization was preparing potential emigrants to rebuild their historic homeland, and were instead inclined to believe the accounts of 'witnesses' to the effect that Hehaluts

⁷⁴ Y. Eliach, *There Once Was a World: A Nine-Hundred-Year Chronicle of the Shtetl of Eishyshok* (Toronto, 1998), 499, 501.

⁷⁵ N. Kacas, *Išmokyk mus skaičiuoti mūsų dienas* (Kaunas, 2001), 69; see also S. Yarovski, 'To Riteve with Longing', in A. Levite (ed.), *A Yizkor Book to Riteve: A Jewish Shtetl in Lithuania*, rev. D. Porat and R. Stauber (Cape Town, 2000), 75.

⁷⁶ Kacas, *Išmokyk mus skaičiuoti mūsų dienas*, 41.

was secretly harbouring communists and serving as a means to enable young Jewish men to avoid military service, as it could supply them with less than legal documents and send them abroad if the need arose.⁷⁷ Hehaluts's central board, among whose members were the leaders of the Zionist Socialist Party, denied these rumours about communists in their midst and had to go to great lengths to avoid the closure of the entire organization. In hindsight, life on the kibbutzim of Hehaluts was more reminiscent of work and leisure camps than of conspiratorial centres propagating ideas opposing the state. Reading the accounts of participants at various levels of the organization's programmes, one gets the impression that an atmosphere of a large, happy family prevailed at the centres. Nor was a young person's support for Hehaluts dependent on the inculcation of ideals of Zionism (emigration and the rebuilding of a national and political home) or socialism (collectivization and the creation of a new society founded on the principles of social equality): the movement became popular among Jewish youth because of the specific activities that it offered and the personal encouragement that it provided to participants. The emphasis was less on the hard and wearying labour than on what would follow it. Most often, young people were attracted to Zionist socialist organizations not for their programmatic goals or collective work, but because of the desire to engage in some kind of social activity, to spend leisure time in the company of others, and to go on the summer camps: 'I remember the camp in Citibiai in the Raseiniai district. There were a whole lot of tents. Camp fires burned and we were certain that the food we ate there was the most delicious we had ever tasted. We bought produce from the friendly neighbouring farmers. There was no end to the songs and dances.'⁷⁸

The Zionist socialists had several youth organizations in their trust. One of them, which had strong organizational and ideological affiliations with Tse'irei Tsiyon—Hitahadut, was the Jewish student society Gordonia. Yet in terms of its influence on young Zionist socialists, it was a secondary organization. It was named after Abraham David Gordon, a known Zionist with Litvak roots whose experiences inspired many followers in various countries.⁷⁹ He took his motto for life from the statement: 'Man becomes more evil the further away he drifts from nature, and only a return to a normal way of life can determine a nation's revival. Physical work can cure Jews of all their ailments and the hate of the nations surrounding them in the diaspora.'⁸⁰ The League for the Working Erets Yisra'el could not develop its cultural and educational pursuits since the 'unreliability' of its president, Efraim Grinberg, meant that any activities that it undertook were interpreted as the nurturing of Jewish working youth in the 'communist spirit'.⁸¹ The organization's

⁷⁷ Agency news, 27 June 1937: LCVA, f. 438, ap. 1, b. 1103, fo. 3.

⁷⁸ Yarovski, 'To Riteve with Longing', 74.

⁷⁹ Die Zionistische Jugendorganisationen: YIVO Archives, RG 2, folder 1462, fo. 66825.

⁸⁰ Laker, *Istoriya sionizma*, 395.

⁸¹ Report to the Security Agency's branch commander, 17 Apr. 1934: LCVA, f. 438, ap. 1, b. 1032, fo. 15.

reading rooms and clubs, registered in 1929, came under the banner of Hehaluts after five years of lacklustre performance.⁸²

The statutes of the sports organizations Hapo'el (The Worker) and Hako'ah (Power) in Lithuania, which were managed by the Zionist socialists, declared their support for goals typical of such organizations—to engage in all types of sport and to strive towards the physical and spiritual nurturing of young Jewish people, thereby raising a healthy generation of the Jewish nation. The sports clubs were established on the initiative of the Zionist socialists to meet the needs of the members of the League for the Working Erets Yisra'el, which is why the programme of their cultural activities clearly reflected their founders' party line. According to memoir accounts, Hako'ah, which was the result of the initiative of several individuals, was more of a spontaneous entity than Hapo'el, and because of its disorganization only existed for a few years at the end of the 1920s.⁸³ However, its liquidation was certainly hastened by the unpopularity of the party ideology of the Zionist socialists with the Lithuanian government. According to information gathered by police agents, the organization, which consisted at the outset of about 500 members of various political orientations, invested little effort in sport and engaged rather in political activities. It grew at the expense of other Zionist socialist youth organizations that had closed down, and attracted into its ranks 'young students from the provinces', until in the end, individuals well known to the state security organs took the control of the centre into their own hands and 'communized' the sports organization.⁸⁴ In 1933 Hapo'el was registered afresh, uniting thirteen clubs from across Lithuania, mostly in the larger cities and towns.⁸⁵ The leaders of Hapo'el were members of the governing body of the Zionist Socialist Party, including individuals such as Efraim Grinberg, Eliahu Valdberg, and Tsvi Brik. In the mid-1930s, the league may have had as many as 2,500 members.⁸⁶ The leadership of Hapo'el tried to sustain its activism and ideological propaganda through its cultural and educational activities.⁸⁷

POLITICAL ALLIES AND OPPONENTS

Like many other organizations, the Zionist socialist camp, competing for its 'own' space and influence in the political, social, and cultural life of independent Lithuania and within the Jewish community, had its fair share of political allies and opponents. Some of the harshest criticism of Zionist socialism came from the within the Zionist

⁸² The Jewish youth organization Hehaluts in Lithuania, Kaunas branch, 11 June 1934: LCVA, f. 402, ap. 8, b. 153, fo. 6.

⁸³ J. Jozelit, 'Sport organizatsyes', in Laykovich (ed.), *Lite*, ii. 497–8.

⁸⁴ Agency news, 24 Sept. 1929: LCVA, f. 438, ap. 1, b. 747, fo. 3; Report to the Security Agency's branch commander, 17 Apr. 1934: LCVA, f. 438, ap. 1, b. 1032, fo. 15.

⁸⁵ List of Jewish societies and unions registered at the Kaunas city and district commander's office: LCVA, f. 378, ap. 10, b. 886, fo. 10.

⁸⁶ Jozelit, 'Sport organizatsyes', 498.

⁸⁷ A-ė, 'Hapoel', *Socialdemokratas*, 18 Feb. 1933.

camp, from the Zionist revisionists. The Zionist socialists, as the representatives of the left wing of the Zionist movement, spent much creative energy in an ideological battle with the Zionist revisionist organizations. The Zionist socialist leaders in Lithuania were inclined to accept workers with a Zionist orientation, since they were ‘the only ones who defended themselves and stood up against Revisionism, which is giving rise to a mood of extremism among young people . . . It is Zionist socialists who have won the sympathy of Jewish workers for the movement in the world political arena and in the eyes of the great nations.’⁸⁸

The avalanche of disputes and mutual accusations intensified particularly during election campaigns to the Zionist Congresses. Lithuania’s Zionist socialists also distributed leaflets urging conflict:

Our comrade workers, friends of a free and working Palestine, know this: we are heading into a difficult and fateful battle, a battle between workers’ Zionism and Jewish fascism. This is a battle for the victory of Zionism, for the destiny of Palestine . . . It is a life-or-death battle for Zionism, similar to the tragic event in Germany that ended with defeat by black reaction. Will we also allow the black forces to encroach on the victory of Zionism? . . . We must arrive at the congress as the strongest organized force in Zionism, as the purest contenders for the Zionist movement’s leadership . . . all as one force, take a shekel and deal a fatal blow to Jewish reactionism.⁸⁹

In this propaganda battle, the one side’s virtues and the other’s vices were listed:

Remember the Jewish [workers’] merits in the Zionist movement . . . Jewish *halutsim* have revived Galilee and the Emek, have transformed deserts into roads and planted orange groves and vineyards where once there were swamps; Jewish workers have revived a free, modern Hebrew culture; Jewish workers are the brave and strong vanguard of the Jewish nation on the road to freedom and liberation . . . Don’t forget, Jabotinsky’s putschism and dictatorial game is a mark of shame on our freedom movement; the Revisionists are spreading hatred for Jewish *halutsim*, they are an organized enemy of Jewish workers, sheltering speculators and strike-breakers under their wing. It is time that the tumour in the Zionist movement—fascist Revisionism—was excised.⁹⁰

Once the British government had set its quota for migration into Palestine in 1925 and started reducing this figure every year thereafter, competition among Zionist organizations for the limited number of immigration permits to the ‘promised land’ grew even fiercer. The leadership of the Palestinian Office in Lithuania that distributed certificates for emigration to Palestine was in the hands of the Zionist socialists. The Zionist revisionists’ demands that they should receive as many immigration permits as the other Zionist organizations usually ended up in threats, provocations, and physical confrontations that appeared in the local press, as well as becoming

⁸⁸ Proclamation to the Jewish community about the 18th Zionist Congress: YIVO Archives, RG 2, folder 1453, fo. 66178.

⁸⁹ To the Congress. Proclamation of the Palestinian Jewish Workers’ Organization: YIVO Archives, RG 2, folder 1453. ⁹⁰ Ibid.

known to the forces of law and order.⁹¹ The essence of this conflict lay in a varied understanding by the groups concerned as to how the general vision should be realized, and in competition for influence to be the final decision-maker among the Zionist organizations. The Zionist revisionists were, without reservation, in favour of a national home for Jews on both sides of the Jordan. The Zionist socialists maintained that such a goal was insane and could lead to the loss of the gains already made in previous years. That is why their compromising and sometimes passive position in their politics with the Great Powers, above all the United Kingdom, was harshly criticized and became the object of never-ending debates.

Better relations developed between the Zionist socialists and the Lithuanian Social Democrats, whose ideals were also oriented towards socialism. The practical result of this relationship was common work carried out in areas relevant to both organizations. Lithuanian Social Democrats and Zionist socialists together headed organizations that represented the working class, and they collaborated in co-ordinating their policies concerning the National Health Insurance Fund. Shmuel Kaplan represented the Zionist socialists on the central committee of the National Health Insurance Fund in Kaunas for a long time, and was also known as a workers' leader; he was later replaced by Mordechai Fridman and Eliahu Valdberg. Another area in which the Zionist socialists and the Social Democrats co-operated was in the creation of trade unions. Lidija Purienienė of the Lithuanian Social Democrats and Shmuel Fridman of the Zionist socialists were long-standing juridical consultants to the trade unions' central committee. In honour of Fridman's repatriation to Palestine in 1934, the Zionist socialist central committee arranged a farewell evening at which a number of colleagues from the Lithuanian Social Democrat organization were present, among them its leader, Steponas Kairys.⁹² In turn, Lithuanian Zionist socialists joined in the marking of events and festivals important to the Social Democrats, co-operated in arranging cultural and educational events for Lithuanian students, and shared their agitational materials.⁹³

CONCLUSION

The convergence of two ideologies in one movement was achieved without significant conflict. It is true that the Zionist and socialist programmes both had clear goals. However, what made their co-ordination possible was that this orientation of Zionism offered a path for supporters of socialist transformation to realize their ideals without having to renounce their national identity.

Independent Zionist socialist movements started forming in Lithuania at the end of the First World War. As part of the worldwide Zionist movement and the Zionist

⁹¹ Agency news, 24 Feb. 1938: LCVA, f. 438, ap. 1, b. 1032, fo. 21.

⁹² Fridman, 'Di tsyonistishe sotsyalistishe bavegung in lite', 68.

⁹³ Agency news, various dates 1928–30: LCVA, f. 438, ap. 1, b. 1032, fos. 2–3, 6, 7–7^v; f. 438, ap. 1, b. 747, fos. 3–4.

Organization, Lithuania's Zionist socialists maintained a common political line, trying to contribute to the realization of their ideals through their practical activities. It should also be noted that the executive organs of the Zionist Organization were in the hands of Zionist socialists. Propaganda throughout all countries spoke widely of their deeds and of the benefits they could bring to the entire Jewish nation. That is why support for Zionist socialists on Lithuania's Jewish street was often identified with support for the Zionist movement in general.

Zionist socialists, who through compromises combined their vision for the future with work for the good of the Jews in the Lithuanian state, were active in the social, economic, and cultural spheres. The progressive growth in influence of socialist Zionism was determined by a whole range of factors: class divisions within the Jewish community, the declining economic position of the Jews and the post-war restrictions on emigration, the weakness of their Jewish opponents, and the calibre of the organization's leaders, who enjoyed significant respect within the Jewish community and exerted influence on the community's opinions.

Yet in spite of the support that they enjoyed, the Zionist socialists were not short of opponents from either the right or the left wing. It is clear that in walking the thin line between the political left and right in the name of their ideological position, and in trying to perform the balancing act of maintaining considerable influence on the Jewish street while being hampered by the constant supervision of the security organs, the Zionist socialists naturally met with repeated setbacks on the long road towards political success.

Everything came to an end with the first Soviet occupation of the Lithuanian Republic, when Zionist organizations in Lithuania were declared counter-revolutionary and reactionary, harmful to the state. In Soviet propaganda Zionists were 'bourgeois nationalists' and toadies of ex-president Antanas Smetona. All political, professional, cultural, sports, educational, and social organizations of the Zionists were closed. The teaching of Hebrew was forbidden and the Zionist press banned. In addition, the Zionist leaders were repressed, whether sent to prison or exiled. And the socialist part of the ideology of the Zionist socialists was of little help to them at the end.

Translated from the Lithuanian by Albina Strunga

